Rebuilding New Orleans:
The Lower 9th Ward
Finding the soul of a community
The devastation of Hurricane Katrina could not have been greater than in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhoods. Located in the easternmost downriver portion of New Orleans, these communities of more than 14,000 residents were ravaged by floodwater from broken levees and overflowing canals. Houses were severed from their foundations, while even the highest point was covered with nearly three feet of water contaminated by a spill at the Murphy Oil refinery in Meraux.

Two years after Katrina, the Lower Ninth Ward’s Holy Cross neighborhood is still reaching out for help to rebuild its community. To assist residents in communicating their needs, Mithun’s CulturalAudit™ team produced a multi-media tool composed of visual stills of their circumstances, narrated in their own voices. Over a three-day period, residents, workers and community stakeholders were interviewed to describe and give life to startling images of their harsh surroundings. The outcome is an authentic picture of the current state of Holy Cross.

CulturalAudit™ employs a camera, audio recorder, microphone, notepad and computer for community research and outreach. Mithun is using this multi-media tool to heighten awareness about the support required to revitalize and rebuild the Lower Ninth Ward. CulturalAudit™ has helped to capture Holy Cross residents in their rebuilding process and give recognition to their need for health care and flood protection.

On August 21, 2007 Global Green USA, an environmental nonprofit organization, hosted the New Orleans Compact Roundtable – a gathering of over 100 local and national leaders in green building, community development and affordable housing. The goal was to plan for sustainable development of the Gulf Coast region. Mithun’s CulturalAudit™ was presented to educate the attendees about the Holy Cross neighborhood’s situation, and used as a catalyst for discussion throughout the day.

The residents of Holy Cross do not want to be forgotten. Mithun’s CulturalAudit™ is telling the world about the community’s ongoing struggle to recover from the destruction of Hurricane Katrina.

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-Holy Cross Resident

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"As I live day-by-day I’m totally and consistently amazed at the determination and resilience of the people down here. It is unbelievable!"

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"Making their voices heard"
Laura Curry  
Creative Director of Research + Consumer Insight  
CulturalAudit™

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LEED® Accredited Professional, Senior Associate  
Integrated Planning Strategist

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LEED® Accredited Professional  
The CulturalAudit™ completed for the Lacey Gateway Master Plan project provided team members with a sensitivity and greater understanding of the community’s heritage, culture, psychographics and trends.  
I believe having this information has allowed the design team to create a place genuinely representative of the local community and culture.

Scott Wyatt, FAIA, Managing Partner of NBBJ  
I witnessed Laura present Cultural Audit™ research to Bruce Mau Design Inc. — a firm recognized for pioneering communication design. She impressed us with her in depth exploration of a specific neighborhood that gave the insights necessary for achieving the most appropriate designs.  
Laura’s research method and presentation is smart, innovative and well crafted.

Matt Petersen, CEO and President of Global Green USA  
On behalf of everyone at Global Green USA, I would like to thank you for your contribution to the New Orleans Compact Roundtable as a co-facilitator and attendee.  
The experience and background you brought to the introductory conversation helped frame the issues to be discussed, as well as motivate and further educate all in attendance.